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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 003441

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: LUKE-WARM TO HOSTILE REACTION TO PRESIDENT'S  
MIDEAST SPEECH

Classified By: AMBASSADOR EDWARD W. GNEHM FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

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SUMMARY

1. (C) A survey of Embassy contacts suggests that President Bush's June 24 speech received mixed reviews here. More hard-line Palestinian Jordanians charged that the U.S. was in "cahoots" with the Israelis to destroy the Palestinian resistance, and expressed resentment about "U.S. interference" with a "democratically-elected Palestinian Government". More moderate contacts tepidly applauded some parts of the speech, but at the same time criticized perceived ambiguity in the speech. Almost all contacts expressed concern about the implications for the peace process and U.S. engagement if Arafat is re-elected in open, fair elections. End Summary.

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HARD-LINE VIEW: U.S. WANTS A KARZAI FOR PALESTINE

2. (C) Reaction from the Islamist camp was predictably negative. One Muslim Brotherhood rank and file member called the speech, "condescending...the U.S. President is deciding how we should liberate our country". He claimed that the "U.S. wants a Karzai for Palestine." Jamel al-Bakri, an Islamic Action Front representative, told the press that Bush has sided with the pro-Israeli camp, which will reinforce anti-American sentiment in the region. One press contact who visited Bakaa camp--the largest refugee camp in Jordan--on June 25 said residents who had viewed the speech saw "no difference between the U.S. and Israel". Several camp residents repeated the mantra, "resistance is the only way a defenseless people can gain a state from a more powerful enemy who has more powerful weapons." According to camp residents, the speech was seen by many as a way for Sharon to get out of his present crisis. Unlike the reaction to the President's April 4 speech, more hard-line contacts criticized the administration's lack of concern for the Palestinians.

3. (C) UNRWA Deputy ComGen Karen Aby Zayd reported to Refcoord the negative reaction to the speech among Palestinians in Gaza, "...the speech has shifted the onus of responsibility from Arafat and the PA to the Palestinian people" and "set out conditions that never can be met." Several Palestinian contacts complained that the speech "gave Sharon everything that he wanted." One contact said that the 3-year time table, "will give Sharon enough time to create a fait accompli".

4. (C) A group of young Palestinians who were watching the speech at a dinner attended by the Ambassador walked out several minutes into the speech to protest its content. A group of Palestinian Jordanians who watched the speech with PAoff sat through the whole thing, but were shocked and dejected by the perceived anti-Palestinian tone and rejection of the current PA leadership.

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MODERATES: END GAME GOOD, BUT HOW DO WE GET THERE?

5. (C) Moderate contacts were more balanced in their criticism. Adnan Abu Odeh, former Royal Court advisor, had the most positive reaction to the speech, calling it "better than the status quo", but he voiced concern about the lack of details on how to enforce the speech's vision. He predicted that no one in the current environment would oppose Arafat in the elections. He also said that while he interpreted the President's emphasis on a new PA leadership to mean a change in leadership, he opined that the PA is interpreting "new leadership" to mean Arafat's re-election followed by a declaration that there is "new leadership". Abu Odeh asked "then what happens to the Peace Process if Arafat is reelected?" Hani Hourani, head of the Al-Urdun Al-Jadid Research Center, also asked about U.S. involvement if Arafat was re-elected. He said the speech contained some positive steps for the Palestinians, including the 3-year timeframe and the stronger commitment to a Palestinian state based on UN resolutions, but warned that the layman, who can't read between the lines, will view the language as favoring Sharon.

16. (C) Dr. Mohammad Kheir Mustafa of the Amman Center for Peace and Development pointed out that the 3-year timeframe is "something beyond the power of the Administration because of the coming presidential elections." Dr. Mustafa, who recently hosted a conference with Israelis, Jordanians, and an American Jewish group, also pointed to the discrepancy he saw between the increased conditions placed upon the Palestinians in the speech and the lack of immediate conditions on the Israelis. He did, however, applaud the reference to building Palestinian institutions and improving the living conditions of the Palestinians. Jamal Rifai, a Palestinian Jordanian human rights activist, said the speech was very fair "in terms of ultimate goals", but the mechanism for getting there is not. He also warned that the continued Israeli incursions will ensure that an environment, which could support the election of a moderate Palestinian leadership, will not develop.

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COMMENT  
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17. (C) For many contacts, the June 24 speech raised more questions than answers. Not surprisingly, the President's references to the need for a Palestinian state, a three-year timeline, and an end to "the Israeli occupation that began in 1967" based on UNSCRs 242 and 338 were well received. However, the call for Arafat's departure, clear terrorism-first sequencing, and vague timeline to reach a Palestinian state and an end to occupation garnered the most criticism.  
Gnehm